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REPORT OF THE INFORMATION SYSTEMS COORDINATION COMMITTEE ON ITS FOURTH SESSION

(Geneva, 7-9 October 1996)

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Information Systems Coordination Committee (ISCC) held its fourth session from 7 to 9 October 1996 at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) at Geneva.

2. In opening the session, the former Chairperson, Mr. Denis Aitken (World Health Organization (WHO)) introduced the new Chairperson, Ms. Kerstin Leitner (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)). The Committee expressed appreciation to Mr. Aitken for his service; it had welcomed his wise counsel, and wished him every success in his future endeavours. The Committee welcomed Ms. Leitner.

3. The agenda adopted by the Committee, including the relevant document references, is contained in annex I, and the list of participants is contained in annex II.

I. MATTERS FOR ENDORSEMENT OR APPROVAL BY THE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITTEE

A. Information systems technology and services

4. With respect to shared systems of widespread usage throughout the member agencies, ISCC recommends that an inter-agency funding mechanism be established outside the ISCC budget. Systems in production and candidates for production are:

(a) Shared Internet services, currently at the International Computing Centre, for the official Web site locator for the United Nations system;

(b) A proposed inter-agency "Intranet";

(c) The United Nations Shared Cataloguing and Public Access System (UNCAPS);

(d) Possible future systems that might be recommended by ISCC as being appropriate to the proposed mechanism.

B. Wider accessibility of information

5. With respect to policies on electronic information access and dissemination, ISCC recommends that:

(a) The Internet be the primary but not sole technology for electronic access and dissemination for external clients;

(b) All agencies be required to register their Internet servers with ISCC;

(c) The model policy statement developed by the ISCC Task Force on Information Access and Dissemination (see annex III below) be endorsed by ACC to be adapted and adopted by ISCC member agencies themselves;

(d) All United Nations bodies have search engines on their Web sites.

6. ISCC also recommends that its 1998-1999 work programme be organized in a manner that would focus its activities on three main areas:

(a) Information infrastructure;

(b) Improvement of access to information;

(c) Modernization of dissemination of information.

C. Terms of reference

7. ISCC recommends that OC note that, in implementing the Information Systems Applications of United Nations Organizations (UNAPPS), ISCC has fulfilled one of its terms of reference, i.e., to provide an electronic repository on information system developments within the United Nations system.

D. Appointment of Secretary

8. ISCC recommends that its current Secretary, Mr. John Northcut, be appointed for a second term.

E. Proposed agenda, dates and venue for the fifth session of the Committee

9. ISCC recommends that its fifth session be held at Geneva for three days, between 6 and 16 October 1997, with the understanding that, pending further discussion, the session could be held in New York instead. The agenda should include:

(a) Reports from the various task forces;

(b) Oral presentations on themes related to best practices, results-oriented demonstrations and information-sharing among coordination bodies;

(c) Other items still to be determined due to the rapid changes taking place in information management and information technology.

II. SUMMARY OF ACTION TAKEN AND DECISIONS ADOPTED BY THE INFORMATION SYSTEMS COORDINATION COMMITTEE

A. Task Force on Inter-library Cooperation, Standards and Management

10. ISCC urges the widest participation by the libraries of its member agencies in UNCAPS once the pilot project has been completed and determined to be a success in a review by the Task Force. UNCAPS will be placed into production at ICC, subject to the implementation of the inter-agency funding agreement recommended to OC in paragraph 4 above.

11. The Secretary of ISCC will officially notify all libraries within the United Nations system that, once in production at ICC, UNCAPS will:

(a) Reduce the need for original cataloguing by library staff;

(b) Facilitate public access to bibliographic records and cited publications via the World Wide Web;

(c) Require participating United Nations system libraries that have not adopted the Machine-Readable Catalogue (MARC)[1] format to make arrangements, either through commercial firms or within agencies' resources, to undertake data conversions to provide input to the shared system.

B. Task Force on Information Access and Dissemination

12. The Internet is to be the primary but not sole technology for electronic access and dissemination for external clients.

13. Each United Nations body should establish for itself an information dissemination policy that identifies all clients and classifies types of information intended for access and dissemination.

14. ISCC needs to create, promulgate and maintain system-wide standards and recommended (best) practices for electronic information access and dissemination.

15. United Nations bodies should adopt best practices for information access and dissemination, which are necessary to promote non-duplication and a consistent orientation.

16. There is a requirement for a single official and comprehensive United Nations system (multilingual) official Web site locator directing access to all United Nations information that is available electronically. All agencies are to be required to register their main Internet universal resource locators (URLs) with ISCC and to notify ISCC of any changes for reflection on the official locator.

17. Web sites of individual United Nations bodies should contain a link, preferably on the home page or main URL, to the official Web site locator so as

to encourage wide navigability and knowledge of where the official home page for the United Nations system as a whole is located also and to provide easy access to other United Nations system information sources.

18. Common searching and indexing mechanisms are required. United Nations standard subject-searching mechanisms should be used, commencing within the 1998-1999 biennium.

C. Task Force on Document Management Technology

19. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has been selected as the lead agency, subject to confirmation by FAO management. The approach recommended in the interim report has been accepted. However, there will be no necessity for pilot projects, and the Task Force may be continued - subject to budget approval - beyond the current biennium.

20. The Chairperson of the Task Force, in conjunction with the Chairperson of the Task Force on Inter-library Cooperation, Standards and Management, should estimate how much of the projected levels of information retrieval from the shared facilities of the United Nations system are expected to be attributable to inter-agency sharing and how much to public access.

D. Task Force on Information Management and Standards

21. An ISCC working group on Internet security should be set up, which could also be charged with Internet domain naming for the United Nations system.

22. The ISCC secretariat should implement at ICC a restricted Web site, available only to ISCC focal points under password control, to contain information on desktop migration.

23. ISCC members should be encouraged to share information about client server projects and associated external consultants, which would be useful for allowing other members to gain experience in starting projects and choosing consultants.

24. Taking into account the work of the Inter-agency Telecommunication Coordination Group, the Task Force should develop a set of recommended (best) practices on electronic conferencing. The initial priority should be video conferencing, for which task a consultant could be retained.

25. There is a general view that site licensing is important. Apart from the gathering of hard data, actual negotiating teams should be formed, as the need arises.

26. The Chairperson of the Task Force has been requested to write to OC concerning the creation of a standing committee on classification in order to review and amend its outdated scheme and provide a solid basis on which ISCC may develop its detailed recommended practices on access and dissemination in a harmonized manner, specifically for the subject search mechanisms.

E. Proposed budget outline

27. The budget will be revised along the lines of the consensus reached at the fourth session (see also sect. I above).

28. The revised draft document will be recirculated to ISCC focal points by electronic means before the formal approval process begins.

F. Appointment of the Secretary of the Committee for 1997-1999

29. The Committee unanimously expressed its highest satisfaction with the services of its current Secretary, Mr. John Northcut, whose term will end in May 1997.

30. The Committee also unanimously decided to appoint Mr. Northcut for a second term as Secretary. It considered the fact that information systems/information technology will play an increasingly important role in United Nations system reform efforts, and that Economic and Social Council members are becoming more vocal in their demands for information resources.

31. For those reasons, and also because the Chairperson of the Committee is in New York and because personal constraints would hinder Mr. Northcut from accepting a second term as Secretary at Geneva, the Committee requests the Organizational Committee to consider favourably a temporary relocation of the ISCC secretariat to New York. It is assumed that such a move will be cost-neutral and will certainly save all costs related to the identification and selection of a suitable replacement. The Committee also places a high value on continuity in the ISCC secretariat, which cannot be guaranteed if Mr. Northcut ends his secondment.

32. The ISCC Chairperson has been requested to approach the Organizational Committee to obtain an early decision on that matter.

G. Other business

33. There will be increased reliance on video conferencing and electronic discussion groups.

34. The Committee agreed that the Task Force on Information Access and Dissemination has completed its work, and that the Task Force on Expansion of Internet Services will commence its activities.

III. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

A. Task Force on Inter-library Cooperation, Standards and Management

35. The Chairperson of the Task Force, Mrs. Eleanor Frierson (International Labour Organization (ILO)) briefed ISCC on the work of the Task Force.

36. The emphasis of the work of the Task Force had been on content rather than information technology in itself. United Nations system libraries feel that they have quality collections of materials to offer, with some agencies even having small collections of full text already in electronic form.

37. The background of the task force had been that initial surveys of United Nations libraries had indicated that there were a large number of tasks with respect to inter-library cooperation that could be undertaken. It had been necessary to set priorities and to concentrate some initial Task Force efforts on common standards that were needed but lacking within the United Nations system.

38. It was known that there were in excess of 120 libraries within the United Nations system doing original cataloguing. To attempt to rationalize such work, the Task Force had had to look into data standards. An early focus was on use of the international standard known as MARC, which had already been endorsed.

39. It had been determined by the Task Force that it was possible to build a shared database that could be used to provide:

(a) A cataloguer's view;

(b) A public view.

The cataloguer's view would enable libraries to reduce the amount of original cataloguing by providing access to cataloguing already done at other libraries. The public view would be one element enabling the United Nations system to respond to the various Council resolutions on easy, unencumbered access.

40. The resulting system, however, must be placed into a continuum, which in the view of the Task Force, meant making the system ever more contemporary, with eventual links to document management, Internet Web sites and other electronic materials. For that purpose, library staff had skills that could be contributed to enhancing access to bibliographic records. A feasible goal would be to have in place in three to five years a point of access in any one United Nations system library to the combined collections of the entire system. Future versions of the system could be enhanced to provide maps, slides, video clips, audio recordings, etc.

41. It had been decided by the Task Force that the SiteSearch system met United Nations system requirements. Using SiteSearch, it would be possible to:

(a) Create and maintain databases;

(b) Do sophisticated indexing;

(c) Perform searching on bibliographic records;

(d) Employ a Web interface.

42. The demonstration system, which ISCC viewed, had taken four days to install at ICC, thanks to the dedication of the ICC staff and ISCC consultants involved; similar sites were known to have taken four months to install. The demonstrator, Mr. Ed Kazlauskas, reviewed the background before undertaking to show the specifics of the system.

43. Sample searches were shown, involving subject searching, displaying results and then sending results by electronic mail (e-mail) to a chosen address. The ability to refine searches was also demonstrated, as was the ability to use filters by date, library name, etc. Other system features were the browsing capability and on-line help functions.

44. In the ensuing question period, it was clarified that, in this implementation, the Web browser provided connectivity to an on-line database and not to Hypertext Markup Language-based documents, which represented an advance over many Web sites within the United Nations system.

45. It was pointed out that libraries would need the MARC format to participate in the system, and there might be a need to convert. For some, that would be easy but not trivial; for others, particularly those with proprietary formats and/or manual card catalogues, conversion would be a significant undertaking.

46. Arguments for joining were the ability to guide clients on-line to depository libraries, the elimination of duplicate cataloguing and possible on-line links to sales systems and full-text documents. ISCC therefore decided to endorse the Task Force recommendations on the understanding that any resulting production system would:

(a) Only be implemented if a critical mass of United Nations libraries were committed to participation after a trial period. The Task Force should determine the level of such commitment and report back for discussion and recommendation to ISCC;

(b) Be placed into service at the ICC.

47. The Task Force should look into providing additional information on cost savings as an incentive to join the scheme, and circulate such information electronically to all ISCC focal points in the coming months.

48. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) agreed to join the membership of the Task Force. It was also agreed that demonstrations at additional agencies, including North American-based ones, would be organized.

B. Task Force on Information Access and Dissemination

49. The Chairperson of the Task Force, Mrs. Joyce Amenta (formerly of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), currently at the United Nations) opened her presentation of the final report of the Task Force by reiterating that a major purpose of the Task Force was to respond to Council resolutions on easy, economical, and unhindered access to United Nations information.

50. The original focus and objectives of the Task Force had concerned information management issues with respect to electronic information. Since member agencies at that time had varying levels of capability with respect to the Internet, the emphasis on X.500 as an electronic information management tool had been set aside, and information access and dissemination via the Internet had become the primary focus.

51. The Task Force had developed four products:

(a) The Official Web site locator for the United Nations system;

(b) A report on the use of X.500 technology in the World Bank;

(c) A prototype search engine to retrieve indexed information from the United Nations Web site locator;

(d) A model policy on information access and dissemination as a guideline for each agency to adapt and adopt. The model policy covered issues that could be expected to stand the test of time and specific issues related to Web publishing. Further work on best practices was still needed.

52. In particular, the Web site locator would provide a systematic method for access to all sites within the system from any site, provided agencies included hyperlinks on their own home pages. It was clarified that approximately one third of agencies had already provided such a hyperlink without waiting for the Task Force recommendation to be adopted by ISCC, and another third provided one on subsidiary pages on their Web site.

53. In the ensuing discussion, exchanges of experiences were provided on the Web site locator. It was felt that the map currently accessible at the United Nations Headquarters site could be added as a hyperlink to the locator.

54. With respect to model policy, greater recognition might be given to the role of data owners, data custodians and data disseminators in setting policy. One agency already had a procedure, which could be made available to other agencies. ISCC agreed to implement information access and dissemination policy principles at the agency level.

55. As to X.500, further work needed to be done, which could perhaps be assumed by a follow-on Task Force, as suggested by the Task Force on Information Access and Dissemination, or by another Task Force.

56. There followed a demonstration of the search engine, the United Nations International Organizations Network Search (UNIONS), introduced by

Mr. Stephen Geis (International Telecommunication Union (ITU)) and presented by Mr. Paul Lindner (ITU). UNIONS was an overarching product that provided agencies with the ability to participate in the recommended system-wide search engine and still have individual search engines.

57. The ease of use and ease of administration of the search engine was emphasized. It was pointed out that search results were at times imprecise but enabled users to target further searches among a restricted number of sites. What was indexed was generally the full text of the participating Web sites, although meta-data-based indexes could be searched, where available. The search engine did not rely on bibliographic records but was a meta-index of other indices within the individual agencies.

58. The advantage for the user was to be able to issue one search command that would return results from multiple sites throughout the United Nations system.

59. It was proposed that follow-up demonstrations be held to further refine the prototype, encourage additional United Nations agency Web sites to participate in the prototype, and have ISCC consider as a standard that all United Nations system Internet resources be indexed by a system that had a satisfactory interface with UNIONS. ITU was directed to lead the continuation of those efforts.

60. ISCC decided that the Task Force recommendations would be modified based on the discussion and adopted as set forth in sections I and II above.

C. Video conference with the ad hoc open-ended working group convened by the Economic and Social Council

61. A video conference with New York resulted in a briefing on progress in New York and at Geneva and Vienna on mission connectivity to the Internet, capabilities for missions to build their own Web sites and the training of mission staff.

62. The New York attendees were informed about the ISCC products under development that had been demonstrated at the ISCC meeting, namely, UNCAPS and UNIONS.

63. It was proposed to hold demonstrations of those two products on 18 November 1996 or a suitable alternative date to be arranged, either in person in New York or by video conference. The New York group was informed that those products were in the prototype phase and not yet in production, but that essential feedback was needed from the diplomatic community to ensure that what was being provided met the Council's demand for easy, unencumbered access.

64. For communications with the diplomatic community in New York, the relevant e-mail addresses are:

(a) uniswg@undp.org for the working group;

(b) missions@undp.org for the 114 missions that have Internet e-mail.

D. Task Force on Document Management Technology

65. Mrs. Patty Hamsher (World Bank), on behalf of the Chairperson of the Task Force, presented its interim report.

66. She briefed ISCC on the background of the Task Force and its original terms of reference. It was felt important to point out that in the discussions of the Task Force, a document had been defined as "a bounded whole comprising a collection of information objects that can be managed as a unit". That definition covered electronic documents and differed from the traditional definition of a document within the United Nations system.

67. Important points from the consultant's report were reviewed. No agency of the United Nations system currently appeared to be managing all its electronic documents in a comprehensive way. Partial solutions existed, but electronic documents were not treated as official records in enough cases.

68. Other issues were the records value of documents, the fact that no ready-made solution existed, and that there was a requirement for a harmonized set of high-level requirements, some of which had already been defined by the Task Force.

69. The three dimensions of document management were covered: business processes, information object types and stages in electronic document management, including an explanation of each. The important point made was that it was the business processes that should be the driver, setting priorities for how to implement document management; that is, by mapping the information object types and the stages to specific business processes, a strategy should emerge.

70. As a result of the most recent Task Force deliberations, it was proposed to produce:

(a) An executive report;

(b) Strategies for implementing document management;

(c) Harmonized views on high-level requirements.

71. The Task Force asked for ISCC to concur with the approach being taken and undertook to provide a fuller report at the fifth session of ISCC.

72. In the ensuing discussion, ISCC felt that the greatest difficulty might be identifying business processes, but that once that was done, attention should also be given to clearly identifying expected productivity gains and costs versus benefits.

73. In the ensuing discussion, views were exchanged on whether a pilot project should be organized; whether the approach taken should be to concentrate on information-sharing; how best to cater for meta-data; the importance of including information delivery services via the World Wide Web (on the Internet)

in any strategies to be developed; and the importance of separating content and the need for indexation from any specific software technology being employed.

74. Several agencies reported on their own experience to date with coming to grips with the challenge of document management.

75. ISCC concurred with the overall approach but decided that pilot projects should not be pursued. The concentration would be on developing the revised Task Force products for ISCC consideration and possible forwarding for ACC endorsement under the Committee's terms of reference, which called for it to provide advice on strategic direction.

76. FAO agreed to be the lead agency, effective immediately, subject to confirmation by FAO management. It was suggested that the Task Force lead an Internet discussion group open to all agencies, and that the consultant be retained to synthesize and bring to a conclusion the results of their discussion, subject to her availability.

E. Task Force on Information Management and Standards

77. The Secretary of ISCC presented the report of the Task Force on behalf of the Chairperson, Ms. Kerstin Leitner (UNDP).

78. The presentation began by advising ISCC that the Task Force had completed its work to date by video conference and the use of the e-mail list server facility.

79. The terms of reference of the Task Force are to review broadly where standards are recommended. Very early on, it was decided not to recommend any standardization on specific commercial products, and that, in fact, that would be undesirable. It was also felt that the Task Force should concentrate on only one or two areas. A consensus was reached that one area should be to continue the momentum for and expand reliance on the use of the Internet; the second area would be the introduction of new technologies with three sub-areas (see para. 81 below).

80. With respect to the Internet, there were a host of issues related to information management that could not be covered in a Task Force whose mandate was for a broad review. Therefore, detailed issues would be left to other task forces and working groups. However, three areas were of relative importance and could be completed quickly in a broad review: a contents model; a register of the expanded Internet services that could be provided; and the spawning of a working group on Internet security, which might also include domain naming issues.

81. With respect to new technologies, the three sub-areas covered were migration of the desktop, client servers and video conferencing. With respect to migration, the approach would be to share information on strategies and costs. It could be possible to collect hard data on volumes that might obtain throughout the United Nations system for the purpose of negotiating site licences. One option explored was to make the hard data available to a

negotiating team, which should include ICC, an ISCC focal point and a senior official from a procurement department.

82. With respect to client servers, again the emphasis would be on information-sharing rather than imposing a standard. It was proposed that information about projects and external consultants who had worked on them that were considered to be successful be made available on a private Web site open only to ISCC focal points.

83. With respect to video conferencing, the focus would not be on the technology but the use to which it would be put.

84. There followed an exchange of views on the approach taken by the Task Force and the products proposed. There was a general view that site licensing was important. Apart from the gathering of hard data, actual negotiating teams should be formed as the need arose.

85. Apart from the areas identified by the Task Force, e-mail was mentioned as an area in which some attention to standardization might be required. One approach might be to develop clusters of agencies with similar requirements and the need for easy exchange of e-mail, rather than try to identify a system-wide solution.

86. It was also pointed out that ISCC would need input on standard subject search mechanisms for increased reliance on the Internet, since the cataloguing and indexing of Web information would become a major effort.

87. Several questions were raised concerning the proposed working group on Internet security.

88. The Committee also felt that the term "video conferencing" should be broadened to "electronic conferencing", but that the initial focus under the topic should, in fact, be video conferencing.

89. At the close of the discussion, ISCC agreed to the recommendations of the Task Force on Information Management and Standards, as detailed in section II above, and also recommended that the Chairperson contact OC regarding the establishment of a standing committee on classification.

F. Demonstration of Information Systems Applications of United Nations Organizations

90. The Secretary introduced the topic by explaining that the penultimate item in the terms of reference of ISCC was to provide an electronic repository on information system developments within the United Nations system.

91. ITU had been selected to develop a small application to provide the repository. A demonstration of the software followed, with an explanation that once the database had been populated it would be relatively easy to consult the database and to add/delete/modify records.

92. ISCC agreed that the application should be implemented as a restricted Web site, available only to ISCC focal points. The ISCC secretariat would work with agencies initially on a case-by-case basis to populate the database.

93. Agencies were encouraged by the Chairperson to designate a staff member within the agency to provide timely updates. The Secretary would undertake to provide suggestions for limiting the input to systems of potential common interest.

G. Proposed work programme and budget for the 1998-1999 biennium

94. The proposed work programme was presented by the Secretary of ISCC.

95. On a technical level, the United Nation budget office had advised that the technical parameters would not be available until December 1996. Therefore, the budget had been prepared, using as a basis the technical parameters for the budget of the current biennium (1996-1997).

96. The Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (Financial and Budgetary Questions) (CCAQ(FB)) had recommended to ACC that the target budgets for 1996-1997, as communicated in February 1996 by the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management of the United Nations Secretariat, be used as the base for budgets for 1998-1999. For ISCC, the amount of the target budget (at a maximum) was therefore US$ 1,618,500.

97. The document was still in draft form since budget approval procedures for the subsidiary machinery of ACC required that technical clearance be obtained first from the United Nations budget office. Since that will not be possible until December 1996 at the earliest, the following procedure would be followed with respect to ISCC:

(a) Once the United Nations budget office had communicated the technical parameters, adjusted drafting and technical clearance would be requested from the United Nations budget office (December 1996);

(b) Approval from ISCC by electronic correspondence (January 1997);

(c) Submission to CCAQ(FB) (in time for its February 1997 meeting).

98. Turning to the substance of the work programme, the Secretary explained that it had been proposed to have an overarching strategy for the 1998-1999 biennium that focuses on harnessing technology to find information for information clients both within secretariats and in Member States, while maintaining the momentum to use technology to produce information with the value added by the various organizations.

99. In this regard, most task forces and working groups would have elements of their work programmes related to that overarching strategy.

100. It was proposed to continue to fund Task Force activities to be performed by consultants, but working groups would normally be expected to use existing resources. Meetings would be increasingly done by video conference, which would mean that task forces and working groups would have to meet more often for short conferences of one or two hours duration. Sitting meetings would be held on occasions when major decisions were to be taken.

101. In its consideration of the draft of the work programme, the Committee:

(a) Accepted as a guideline, with certain modifications, a worksheet developed by a subgroup;

(b) Agreed that, after consultation with OC, the Secretary would consult further with task force chairpersons to get more detailed information on the resources required, including in the current biennium;

(c) Added Global Information Infrastructure to an objective with a "technology watch" as an output;

(d) Considered that there needed to be a different inter-agency funding mechanism for which the Secretary would consult OC;

(e) Requested the Secretary to check the procurement rules to verify the status of agencies as suppliers and commercial entities versus the ICC;

(f) Asked ICC to report at future meetings on its services supplied to ISCC;

(g) Noted that the Secretary would consult task force chairpersons regarding indicative time limits for task forces;

(h) Decided to have a report made available on budget utilization.

102. The work programme should be related to an overarching theme and a close link established between task forces and working groups in connection with that theme. It was felt necessary to develop a matrix focused more on outputs than activities. The final proposal would be circulated by electronic means before being submitted to ACC.

103. Therefore, ISCC considered that its future activities should be developed under an overarching strategy that focuses on enhancing the use of information technology to improve access to United Nations system information for United Nations bodies and Member States, and to facilitate the dissemination of information to its users. To that end, ISCC recommended that it organize its 1998-1999 work in a manner that would focus its activities on three main areas: information infrastructure, the improvement of access to information and the modernization of information dissemination.

H. Status of the Internet in Africa

104. ISCC next conducted a video conference with experts at Washington, D.C., from the World Bank and the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

105. A briefing was given on current status and trends, including the fact that most problems in extending access were neither technical nor economic.

106. It was agreed that participation by all agencies, as appropriate to their business needs, would be the best course of action.

107. The World Bank issued an open invitation to all member agencies of ISCC to participate in future meetings concerning that subject matter.

I. Telecommunications

108. The Committee heard an oral briefing on the work of the Inter-agency Telecommunication Coordination Group (IATCG), which was calling for the extension of the United Nations Telecommunication Network for use by the specialized agencies. Mr. Colin Buffam (UNHCR) briefed the Committee on the work of IATCG, including the key areas of its decisions and technical details. He advised that the next meeting would be held on 12 and 13 November 1996, at Washington, D.C., and would be hosted by the World Bank.

109. Mr. Luis Rodrigues (ITU) briefed the Committee on the Geneva Metropolitan Area Network. The four main areas addressed were:

(a) Project overview;

(b) Asynchronous transfer mode;

(c) Applications;

(d) Perspectives for evolution.

J. Draft report of the Joint Inspection Unit

110. A draft of the forthcoming JIU report entitled "Use of information systems and information technology in the United Nations system" was presented to ISCC for discussion. The representatives of JIU were present at the meeting.

111. Substantial feedback was provided suggesting that JIU refocus on different issues, which members found of particular interest and importance to future and current directions within the United Nations system.

K. Information on individual agency activities

112. Attendees provided oral briefings on activities in the various agencies, of relevance to the terms of reference and the work programme of ISCC.

L. Appointment of the next Committee Secretary

113. Meeting in closed session, ISCC turned to the matter of the appointment of its next Secretary (see paras. 8 and 29-32 above).

M. Fifth session of the Committee

114. The Committee determined when and where to hold its fifth session (see para. 9 above).

N. Other business

115. With respect to oral presentations by ISCC focal points at future meetings, it was considered preferable to adopt a different approach; for example, a session on best practices, with one or more facilitators, could be arranged. In addition, there could be an emphasis on results-oriented demonstrations of particularly attractive projects. Cross-fertilization was also seen as important, with increased attention paid to information-sharing among coordination bodies.

116. Concerning membership of the various task forces, the following changes were noted:

(a) The Task Force on Inter-library Cooperation, Standards and Management would retain its current membership, plus IFAD and minus WHO;

(b) The Task Force on Document Management Technology would have FAO as the lead agency, subject to management concurrence, plus UNHCR as a member (UNDP would revert from being a lead agency to a member);

(c) The Working Group on Internet Security, lead agency to be determined, would have as members WHO, UNDP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, IAEA, the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and ITU;

(d) The Task Force on Expansion of Internet Services would have IAEA as lead agency, with the ILO, ITU and WHO as members.

117. In addition to increased reliance on video conferencing, the Committee would include electronic discussion groups as one of its working methods.

118. It was noted that meeting arrangements for the fourth session had been well organized; compliments were expressed to the ISCC secretariat.

Notes

[1] For additional information on MARC, contact http://portico.bl.uk/nbs/pubs/srs2.html. In fact, MARC is neither a catalogue nor a method of cataloguing but a standard format for representing information in a catalogue record in machine-readable form, i.e., for computer processing. MARC was primarily developed to meet the needs of libraries but has since been adopted by the wider information community as a convenient way of storing and exchanging records.

Annex I

AGENDA AND DOCUMENTATION OF THE FOURTH SESSION OF ISCC

		Documentation
1.	Opening remarks, information on UNHCR facilities and introduction of (new) attendees.	-
2.	Adoption of the agenda.	ACC/1996/ISCC/3
3.	Task Force on Inter-library Cooperation, Standards and Management:	ACC/1996/ISCC/4
	(a) Presentation of the report by the Chairperson of the Task Force;	
	(b) Demonstration of the United Nations Shared Cataloguing Database by the Task Force Consultant;	
	(c) Question period;	
	(d) Consideration of the Task Force recommendations.	
4.	Commencement of the oral exchange of information on individual agency activities (if time remaining before lunch).	-
5.	Task Force on Information Access and Dissemination:	ACC/1996/ISCC/2 and annexes 1-4
	(a) Presentation of the Final Report by the Chairperson of the Task Force;	
	(b) Demonstration of the search engine product by ITU and the Task Force Consultant;	
	(c) Question period;	
	(d) Consideration of the Task Force recommendations;	
	(e) Formation of a follow-on task force (assuming adoption of the recommendations), to be known provisionally as the Task Force on Information Disciplines in an Electronic Age, and selection of lead and member agencies.	
6.	Economic and Social Council resolution: video conference with the Chairman of the Council.	E/1996/L.27
7.	Commencement/continuation of the oral exchange of information on individual agency activities.	-

	Documentation
8. Task Force on Document Management Technology:	ACC/1996/ISCC/6 and annex 1
(a) Presentation of the interim report by a representative of the Chairperson of the Task Force;	
(b) Question period;	
(c) Consideration of the Task Force recommendations.	
9. Task Force on Information Management and Standards:	ACC/1996/ISCC/5 and annexes 1-3 (ISM/SYNERGY/1, 2 and 3)
(a) Presentation of the report by the Chairperson of the Task Force;	
(b) Question period;	
(c) Consideration of the Task Force recommendations;	
(d) Consideration of the formation of the Working Group on Internet Security and Domain Naming.	
10. Demonstration of Information Systems Applications of United Nations Organizations: a repository of United Nations system application systems, both existing and being prepared.[a]	-
11. Continuation of the oral exchange of information on individual agency activities (if time remaining before lunch).	-
12. Proposed work programme and budget for the 1998-1999 biennium:	ACC/1996/ISCC/7
(a) Presentation by the Secretary of ISCC;	
(b) Question period;	
(c) Approval of the work programme and budget, with amendments where needed.	
13. Continuation of the oral exchange of information on individual agency activities.	-
14. Oral presentation on the status of the Internet in Africa.	-

		Documentation
15.	Oral presentations on telecommunications:	-
	(a) Inter-agency Telecommunication Coordination Group;	
	(b) Geneva Metropolitan Area Network.	
16.	Draft JIU report.	-
17.	Completion of the oral exchange of information on individual agency activities.	-
18.	Closed session (ISCC members only): appointment of the Secretary of ISCC for 1997-1999.[b]	-
19.	Dates and venue for the fifth session of ISCC.	-
20.	Other business.	-
21.	Adoption of the report.	ACC/1996/ISCC/9

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[a] ISCC focal points will recall that the terms of reference of ISCC are, inter alia, to provide an electronic repository on information system developments within the United Nations system. The system that ITU is developing for ISCC, which will be demonstrated, will be the central component of that repository. The CCAQ membership has also indicated an interest in gaining access to a repository showing both available systems and systems under preparation within the various United Nations bodies.

[b] "With regard to jointly financed secretariats, in considering future appointments to posts of secretaries of ACC subsidiary bodies, the desirability should be borne in mind of appointing to those posts serving staff of United Nations agencies and/or organizations who would be seconded to work with the particular ACC subsidiary body for two years, with a possibility of one extension of a further two years. It is expected that such staff would be reabsorbed into his/her agency/organization upon completion of the assignment. Exceptions may be authorized on presentation of specific justification to the higher body to which the concerned subsidiary body reports.

Generally, the office of chairperson and secretary should not be filled by staff serving in the same agency/organization and neither should the terms of office coincide, so that a degree of continuity may be ensured."

Taken from "Compendium of decisions on the operation of the Administrative Committee on Coordination and its subsidiary machinery" (ACC/1996/INF/1), unedited version, 1 April 1996.

Annex II

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For agenda items 5 and 10, the meeting was joined by:

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For agenda item 15, the meeting was joined by:

Mr. Luis Rodrigues (ITU)

For agenda item 16, the meeting was joined by:

Mr. Andrzej Abarszewski (Joint Inspection Unit)
Mr. John Fox (Joint Inspection Unit)
Mr. Louis Dominique Ouedraogo (Joint Inspection Unit)
Mr. Dave Wilson (Joint Inspection Unit)

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[a] ISCC focal points are marked with an asterisk (*).

Annex III

MODEL POLICY STATEMENT ON PUBLISHING AND DISSEMINATING INFORMATION IN AN ELECTRONIC AGE[a]

INTRODUCTION

This model policy statement consists initially of two parts.

Section I, which covers issues of a general nature, sets out guidelines that can be expected to stand the test of time for some years to come. In particular, it emphasizes the importance of information and its dissemination in a contemporary environment characterized by the growing use of information technology. However, section I is not intended to focus on any particular technology since it is recognized that rapid change in this area is a fact of life.

Subsequent sections will deal with issues of relevance to particular technologies. They will be designed to be used as long as appropriate, and to be discarded or rewritten as technological change is introduced.

Section II (the first of these additional sections) covers Internet publishing issues posed by the growing use of the World Wide Web.

As the policy evolves, it will be extended to cover:

(a) All means and media, including electronic display, printed documents and publications, audio recordings, video tapes and data transmission;

(b) All repositories of information, examples of which are public and press information, electronic databases, library services, statistical information, documents and publications.

The purpose of the model is not only to provide a harmonized view of what policies are appropriate for United Nations organizations but also to enable individual agencies to adopt the policy or adapt it to their own needs. Some agencies may choose to issue such a policy statement as an administrative instruction or staff notice. Others may wish to use it to prepare a working paper for their governing body or for a steering committee within their agency administration. It is intended that this decision be left to each agency.

In due course, additional sections can also be prepared in order to include older technologies, either as part of the model policy or to meet the specific requirements of individual organizations. In this way, the policy will provide comprehensive coverage of the main aspects of information access and dissemination.

For example, an existing (or newly developed) general policy on the provision of material on CD-ROM could be added as a separate section.

As the model policy now stands, it is designed to serve as one building block of current relevance to an overall policy.

I. GENERAL ISSUES

1. The importance of information access

1.1 It is generally agreed that information resources are among the organization's most valuable assets and deserve careful management.

1.2 For many years, electronic technology has been used in the production of information. Since 1990, however, the growing importance of on-line electronic access to information, in accordance with the express wishes of member States, has been recognized.

1.3 The organization intends to make information available electronically and on-line on demand, using contemporary technology. That technology is expected to evolve and to change for the foreseeable future.

1.4 In some cases, material will need to be offered in both electronic and printed form. Other cases may require that only printed or electronic versions be offered. Where there is a statutory requirement to provide printed material, the governing body can be asked to agree to its replacement by electronic alternatives. Thus, a statutory requirement need not in itself be a hindrance to the transition to electronic media. What is more important is the current capability and preference of the target audience with regard to accessing information.

2. Aim of information dissemination policy

2.1 The aim of information dissemination policy is to facilitate the dissemination of an appropriate selection of material, by conventional or electronic means, based on the needs of the organization's target audience. It must be borne in mind that printed publications will continue to exist. However, in many cases, electronic versions are an attractive alternative to what have traditionally been printed documents. There will be a changing mix of electronic and printed matter during the forthcoming decades.

3. Information clients

3.1 In today's environment, information clients can be expected to include: officials of [member/contracting] States; the organization's governing [body/bodies]; staff of [missions/delegations]; other international organizations, including field projects related to technical cooperation; non-governmental organizations; the press and other media; academic institutions and libraries; business and industry, including financial institutions; independent institutions, including regional bodies; self-employed professionals, such as freelance translators; and the general public.

3.2 All of the above are among the organization's clients, with the exception of [list exceptions here or delete the last phrase in this sentence].

4. Classification of information

4.1 Information, regardless of the form in which it is stored (on paper and/or electronic media) or how it is disseminated, can be categorized as follows:

(a) PUBLIC, i.e., information that is available to all information clients with open access to encourage use;

(b) LIMITED but unsecured, i.e., information that is normally not of a sensitive nature but is of primary interest to a select number of individuals;

(c) RESTRICTED with secured access, i.e., information that is sensitive but nevertheless needs to be disseminated to authorized recipients.

4.2 A fourth category of information, CONFIDENTIAL, is not within the purview of this policy statement.

5. Responsibilities of information providers

5.1 Information providers within the organization can be characterized in different ways. Some are the authors of information. Others collect information, generally from [member/contracting] States, and publish it in an enhanced form. Still others compile and edit information from various sources.

5.2 The primary responsibility for making material available electronically lies with these information providers. In performing this function, they should conform with recommended (best) practices issued by the organization.

6. Editorial quality control

6.1 There are a number of advantages introduced by the editing of information for publication:

(a) Ensuring the accuracy of presentation of texts;

(b) Providing a consistent style and organizational image;

(c) Introducing language correction, particularly when authors are not writing in their native tongue;

(d) Raising the quality of contributions from compilers who have limited experience in presenting the results of their work in an accepted format;

(e) Maintaining international acceptability by, for example, avoiding discriminatory or offensive content;

(f) Ensuring that texts are understandable by readers whose first language is not the language of publication;

(g) Ensuring that texts are written, where warranted, at a level of complexity suited to those who are not specialists in the particular subject;

(h) Checking that publications effectively convey the message intended.

6.2 The above advantages apply equally to both traditional and electronic publications. Except in life-threatening emergencies, care should be taken not to bypass the editorial function in the endeavour to disseminate information rapidly.

7. Questions of intellectual property

7.1 In the sphere of information, issues related to intellectual property are of paramount importance.

7.2 The organization retains the copyright to all its published material. Specifically, the organization also retains the copyright to all information made available electronically, whether or not printed versions also exist.

7.3 Material should only be published by or at the request of the authorizing/originating office, i.e., the information provider.

7.4 Care should be taken not to duplicate extensively information that is already available in the same medium. In the case of electronic material, the use of hyperlinks makes duplication unnecessary.

7.5 If information becomes obsolete in the sense that it is no longer current or useful, it must be promptly removed from the production chain but should always be preserved in the archives of the organization.

7.6 Informal and unofficial material should not normally be published on-line; if it is, its unofficial status should be clearly indicated.

8. Confidential information

8.1 The policies set out in this statement do not apply to information that the organization deems to be confidential and/or relevant solely to the internal administration of the secretariat.

II. WORLD WIDE WEB PUBLISHING

1. Use of the World Wide Web

1.1 Internet users will increasingly expect the organization to provide information on the World Wide Web and other modern networking technologies as they appear. While electronic editions of certain material will become available, printed publications will continue to exist in line with demand. In addition, CD-ROM-based products have a client base that may not have or desire access to the Web.

1.2 The organization intends to make electronic material available on the Web to take advantage of the low-cost opportunities now open to it through the use of this Internet service, particularly in an international environment in which conventional distribution expenses are substantial. Until alternative technologies appear that warrant a change of approach, the Web will be the primary but not sole means by which a large volume of information will be made available on demand and on-line.

2. Web publishing

2.1 Many departments and offices in organizations of the United Nations system have started the process of Web publishing.

2.2 Staff involved in this activity need to be aware of the necessity, as with printed material, to maintain a high quality with regard to completeness and authenticity; consistency with and relevance to the approved work programme of the organization; timeliness, which should improve; coherence; clarity of presentation; and readability. In addition, staff must bear in mind ease of use by the organization's information clients and the need to select alternative media in cases in which Web dissemination is not the most appropriate choice.

2.3 With respect to Web publishing, a commitment must be made by a responsible manager who should be:

(a) Familiar with the technical capabilities of the Web;

(b) Responsive to user requirements and priorities for access in a prompt and efficient manner;

(c) Able to arrange training to enable staff to make the transition to the electronic environment.

However, primary responsibility for making documents available electronically will lie with information providers, working in conformity with recommended (best) practices.

2.4 Among best practices, the following are expected to be of initial importance:

(a) Avoiding trivial material by publishing only information with substance;

(b) Ensuring consistency with the (printed) publications strategy and practice of the organization.

2.5 Accordingly, [name of the office/division responsible within the secretariat] will be responsible for issuing specific instructions and promulgating recommended (best) practices in order to avoid confusion as the organization moves to an increasingly electronic environment, in particular by making information available on the Web. [Name of staff member and/or title of post] has been assigned to [supervise/coordinate] this undertaking on a [full-time/part-time] basis. [His/her] role will include actively seeking the

concurrence of originators so that accurate and timely material can be accessed and disseminated electronically via the Web.

2.6 In addition, [title of post] will be responsible for editing electronic material to ensure consistency with the organization's objectives and house style. The design of documents for the Web includes linkages to other documents, and thus differs from the design of conventional printed text. Such inherent design differences need to be taken into account and exploited to their best advantage.

3. Location of Web site

3.1 As is the case for the United Nations system in general, there are three options for the physical location of the organization's Web site. The computer facilities on its own premises or at other United Nations organizations can be used. The International Computing Centre is also available to house Web sites for any United Nations agency. Finally, today's market place has given rise to a number of commercial centres.

3.2 It has been determined that the organization's Web site will be located at [enter details of the agency's choice of location].

3.3 As a result of the new technical features offered by the Web, the organization will also serve as a gateway to all other United Nations agencies by including a prominent reference to the official Web site locator for the United Nations system (http://www.unsystem.org) on its own home page (main universal resource locator).

4. Web-related issues

4.1 Where authoritative on-line information exists in another agency and that agency has ensured its accuracy, the organization will not duplicate such information but will provide on-line access through hyperlinks for clients.

4.2 It is recognized that for various reasons, many individuals in developing States will not have access to the necessary technical infrastructure to use the electronic network. However, agencies responsible for technical cooperation in sustainable development [including the organization] are approaching this challenge. The situation is expected to improve progressively through such efforts as the Global Information Infrastructure initiative.

4.3 Whereas the active dissemination of printed material has required targeted mailings to individuals or institutions, dissemination through the Web will take the form of an on-line response to user queries. Where appropriate, a system will be installed to sign documents digitally so that users can verify their source and authenticity. Administrative procedures will be established, where needed, for affixing digital signatures.

4.4 The organization will initially give priority to making electronic information publicly available free of charge but will also reserve the right to provide information products for a fee via the Web.

4.5 The Web site will include an agreed copyright statement displayed prominently on all material in order to protect the organization's interests. In appropriate cases, the organization may grant permission for certain uses to specific clients or classes of clients, for example, to permit the reproduction of copyrighted material for educational purposes on a non-commercial basis or to enable on-line information to be displayed for private viewing.

5. Timing of Web implementation

5.1 It is expected that at least [enter number] years will be needed for substantially all existing material for which there is an electronic demand to be available via the Web. Once that point is reached, the continuing requirement will be to add fresh material and weed material no longer of use.

5.2 Initially, one priority in the use of the Web will be to publish dynamic (constantly changing) information that needs to be made available rapidly.

Notes

[a] Developed by the ISCC Task Force on Information Access and Dissemination for endorsement by ACC (to be adapted and adopted by ISCC member agencies).

[b] Adapted from those listed in a paper entitled "Maintaining editorial quality control in an electronic environment" (IAMLADP/1996/R.4), submitted by the International Atomic Energy Agency at the Inter-Agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications, Geneva, 24-27 June 1996.